I was recently on the dating app Bumble when I came across the profile of an attractive middle-aged man, a few years younger than I am. He was born on the East Coast and had a big dog, which I liked. But then I read that he was “100 percent drama-free” and demanded that any dates be the same way. I thought, “Here’s somebody who probably won’t listen if I’m having a bad day” and swiped left to indicate my lack of interest. This guy was far from unusual. A surprisingly large number of men say they’re looking for “no drama” or something “drama-free” in their profiles, and I swipe left every time. Women write it too. But according to Tinder, which looked at the profiles of its American users earlier this year, heterosexual men were three times more likely to use these phrases than heterosexual women. Profiles of gay and lesbian users included the phrases much less often. Another dating app, OkCupid, examined the 2018 profiles of all its users in the United States without separating for sexual orientation and found that men over all were 10 percent more likely to say this than women. They also found that 47 percent of millennial men said they were looking for no drama or something drama-free in their profiles, as did 25 percent of Gen X and 12 percent of baby boomer men. I understand that people want joy, laughter and happiness in their relationships. I want that too. But when heterosexual men say they’re looking for something “drama-free,” I suspect they want something that doesn’t exist: a problem-free partnership with someone who has no life experience. Are they looking for a woman who never gets angry or afraid or sad, who never worries about her family or struggles in her job? Who would want to be with such a person? One man I came across online even wrote, “No drama given or allowed.” Aside from questionable grammar, this implies an ability to control life that none of us possess. Life is full of drama. I know. I’ve experienced it. Although I’m an even-keeled person and daily meditator, I’ve still had to face challenges over the last eight years that I never saw coming and required all my strength to endure. After 23 years of marriage, I went through an unexpected and painful divorce. Several people I love deeply suffered from addiction and found their way to recovery (a sentence that doesn’t begin to capture nearly four years of hell). I had to sell our family home and move to a rental. Then I lost my beloved dog, Spike — which, weirdly, felt the worst, coming on top of everything else. Life got messy. But I know many people, including men, who have suffered far worse. It’s hard to live for any time without facing something difficult, whether it’s financial problems, illness, divorce or death. Some people call this “drama.” I call it life. Because I didn’t quite understand what men meant when they said they were looking for “no drama,” I spoke with Jessica Carbino, a sociologist in Los Angeles who specializes in online dating and who used to work for Bumble. She told me that when men in their 20s and 30s say they want something drama-free, they’re looking for women who are “lower maintenance.” When middle-aged men use it, they’re trying to avoid the entanglements that come with former spouses and family. “They could have just gone through a terrible divorce,” Dr. Carbino told me. “They could have presumably been dealing with a lot of issues with their own families, with their children, with their ex-spouses, and they want something that doesn’t present any type of problem or issue.” Vanessa Valenti, co-founder of the feminist website Feministing, had a different take. “I think it’s pretty sexist,” she told me. “You might as well say ‘no humans,’ you know? But sexist behavior exists offline, just like it does on dating apps. This is simply another medium.” She added, “I think there are unrealistic expectations put on women to be accommodating at all times in their relationships.”

Ms. Valenti said that when men say they want no drama, “they’re signaling to others that they’re someone who’s incapable of witnessing and honoring another person’s feelings.” She also expressed concern that the numbers are higher, at least on OkCupid, the younger the men get. “It makes me wonder if it’s become more like online dating app lingo, which actually makes the ‘no drama’ potentially more dangerous because the more it’s used, the more it’s normalized as a common characteristic of a desirable partner and what a desirable partner should be,” she said. “Are we setting a precedent of the emotionless partner who has no needs? In my opinion, that would create a culture of pretty disastrous relationships.” Wouldn’t it make more sense for men and women in the dating world to look inward and develop compassion for themselves, rather than try to control the drama outside them? “When you’ve suffered in these serious ways,” Dr. Mark Epstein, a New York City psychiatrist and Buddhist author, told me, “it lets you see the suffering everywhere, if you’re not pretending that it’s not happening to you.” He said that the growth that results from looking honestly at your challenges and problems — in other words, from being vulnerable — also makes people better partners. “You might actually be more available, more open, more able to be with someone else as a result of this,” Dr. Epstein said. I also wonder if people mean it when they say they’re looking for “no drama.” Imagine “Romeo and Juliet” without the feuding future in-laws and “Brokeback Mountain” without society’s resistance to two men in love. Or “Casablanca” without the return of Ilsa’s husband, not to mention the Nazis who frequented Rick’s bar. Sometimes, love grows sweeter in contrast to the hardships. Perhaps we’re simply all on drama overload, and online profiles reflect what we’re experiencing in the world. We live on a planet whose climate is warming rapidly. We wait in fear of the next mass shooting. We have a president whose tweets elevate our heart rates daily. In a 2018 American Psychological Association survey, 69 percent of respondents reported that the future of the nation caused them stress — six percentage points higher than the year before. This precariousness seems like all the more reason to find a partner who can face the challenges and roll with them. There are days when you accidentally sideswipe your neighbor’s car or you have to check someone you love into rehab. Other days are steeped in joy. The kind of partner I’d like shows up for it all.